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FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9950
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 2311
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 0380
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 2468
RUEHMT/AMCONSUL MONTREAL 0400
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC 1417
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUCOWCV/CGDSEVEN MIAMI FL
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000503

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR, WHA/CCA, S/CRS/, INR/IAA, S/P
SOUTHCOME ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR
TREASURY FOR MAUREEN WAVER

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: HAITIAN PRESIDENT TOURS FLOODED AREAS

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11. (U) Summary. Even before the official June 1 start date of the 2009 hurricane season, heavy rains have already caused 11 deaths and some damage across the country. Haiti's Civil Protection Department has declared an orange alert across the country. President Preval is attempting to get ahead of the issue politically by making three trips in the last two weeks to the Gonaives area, the area most devastated during the 2008 hurricane season, to check on disaster preparedness. He criticized the international community over the pace of operations and asked the Haitian construction authority to take more responsibility. Preval pointed to the existence of shantytowns in vulnerable areas as a contributing factor in the most recent deaths and damage. End summary.

Rainy Season Underway, Hurricane Season Approaching

12. (U) June 1 marks the beginning of the official "hurricane season" in the Caribbean. Already in Haiti, however, the rainy season has begun in earnest, with heavy rains hitting the Artibonite (Gonaives, St. Marc) and south (Les Cayes, Leogane), the Central Plateau, and the Nippe Departments - in addition to heavy rains during the past two weeks in Port-au-Prince. Media reports include accounts of flooding, storm damage and eleven deaths over the past two weeks. Alta Jean-Baptiste, Director of the Department of Civil Protection (DPC), attributed the deaths and damage to a tropical depression that has dumped rain across Haiti, causing the evacuation of an estimated 500 persons and the loss of over 300 homes. DPC declared an orange alert over the entire country.

President Preval Reacts

13. (U) Following his May 18 visit to Archaie to mark Flag Day May 18, the normally reclusive President Preval went a little further up the coast on May 21 to the coastal towns of St. Marc and Gonaives. The visit came after two quick Presidential visits to Gonaives the weekend of March 9 and 12. Both towns are prone to flooding after heavy rains due to their location downstream from the large Artibonite Valley watershed and the mountains that surround it. Preval visited storm affected neighborhoods and checked on progress being made to shore up river banks and prevent a recurrence of last year's devastating loss of life and property. (Note: The people of

Gonaives were the largest and most visible victims of last year's flooding, but similar scenes played out in many other locations in Haiti. End note.) Preval criticized the disaster preparedness work of the international community and said that Haiti's National Equipment Center (CNE - the national agency responsible for procurement and management of heavy equipment) should assume more control over disaster preparedness projects. (Note: The GOH purchased for the CNE dozens of new earthmovers purchased using the USD 197 million emergency fund established in October 2008. The Parliament has repeatedly called for an accounting of disbursement of these funds; the GoH has promised to provide a report in June. End note.)

14. (U) Preval also promised additional support to TECINA, the contractor that is rehabilitating irrigation canals in the Artibonite Valley, the most important Haitian agricultural area with the vast majority of domestic rice production. In his statement to the press, Preval provided details on the work being done to dredge the bed of the La Quinta River. He said that the river flow is greater now than it was in 2004, when the last studies were done, and that therefore more capacity needed to be created than originally planned. Preval also promised that work on bridges spanning the two rivers that converge on Gonaives, the La Quinta and the Mapou Rivers, would be completed but did not provide dates.

Anarchic Construction Partly to Blame

15. (U) During these visits, Preval repeatedly raised the issue of 'anarchic construction,' implying that the many shantytowns ('bidonvilles') have contributed to both the flooding and the elevated death/damage statistics. In Port-au-Prince, local authorities in two different locations (Delmas and Petionville) have

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begun to remove people from areas deemed prone to flooding and mudslides. Shantytowns in Port-au-Prince are concentrated in two locations: high up on steep hillsides surrounding the city and down low in ravines where flood waters accumulate during and after heavy rainfall. (Comment: Preval has suggested that populations in areas prone to flooding or mudslides should move, but the GOH has done little to provide alternate lodging. End comment.)

Comment: USAID Efforts

16. (U) The President's comments belie the considerable international donor effort, including by the USG, to respond to the flooding in Gonaive last year. While some activities are under late-stage planning, others are underway. USAID-funded CHH has begun clearing a major drainage canal in Gonaives that runs alongside the national highway. CHF is also building an upland draining system near the La Quinte River which will protect a few small communities. CHF began reviewing contractor bids for rehabilitating the Haute Plaine irrigation system serving an estimated 500 hectares on May 19. USAID partner IOM is completing irrigation canal work off the La Quinte River in the community of Des Barrieres. USAID has heard that Preval has instructed CNE to work 24 hours a day on the La Quinte riverbed. In light of this Presidential instruction, USAID is revisiting option for use of the aforementioned funds. In any case, USAID is working with DPC and the sectoral technical committees to strengthen institutional capacity to prepare for the upcoming hurricane season. USAID is also working with UNDP to pre-position non-food items and map-rehabilitate and upgrade facilities to be used for shelter.

17. (U) Comment continued: Just as the first heavy rains presage Haiti's hurricane season, Preval is trying to get ahead politically of the natural disaster issue by visiting and inspecting the sites of the worst damage in 2008, and criticizing international and national aid actors. Despite the GoH expenditure of nearly USD 200 million in emergency funds since October 2008, the state of disaster preparedness in Haiti, based on recent flooding incidents in a wide geographic spread of locations, does not look good. Haiti has a

disaster alert system with various color-coded levels (currently yellow and orange nationwide due to continuing heavy rains) but little means of helping the population with practical responses to the alerts.

SANDERSON